

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE HANDBOOK

compiled by

THE BALTIMORE COUNTY COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES



To The Reader:

This Disability Etiquette Handbook has been prepared for you by the Baltimore County Commission on Disabilities. Our purpose in developing the Handbook is two-fold: to increase awareness of appropriate ways to address, and refer to, individuals with disabilities; and, to provide this information in a format that is convenient to use and easy to duplicate.

No handbook dealing with disability nomenclature can claim to be the final word in disability etiquette. The reasons for this are many. As in any culture, different groups and individuals have specific preferences. Language is dynamic, ever-changing, and, hopefully, becoming more clear and precise. It is the hope of the Commission that all who read this Handbook will understand the good intentions behind it, and the thoughtful work that went into developing it. The Commission does not intend to speak for every person with a disability. This Handbook is not about being "PC" – unless "PC" is understood to mean "Polite and Courteous."

Each page of the Handbook is designed to stand on its own so that it can be easily copied and distributed, as needed. You will notice that the logo and name of the Baltimore County Commission on Disabilities appear at the bottom of each page, and it is hoped that you will include them whenever you duplicate a page. We want to increase disability etiquette and, at the same time, broaden public awareness of the Commission.

Like the disability rights movement itself, this Handbook is a "work in progress." In this revised, edition we have added sections on the Attitudinal Barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, as well as a section on Conversation Etiquette. In addition, we have revised the section on Myths About People with Disabilities. Material will continue to be revised since disability awareness, indeed awareness of any type, is an ongoing process, not a static event.

Finally, we would like to thank the City of San Antonio, Texas, Planning Department and their Disability Advisory Committee for allowing us to borrow information from their Disability Etiquette Handbook. The full text of their handbook can be found on their Internet site at www.ci.sat.tx.us/planning/handbook/. Likewise, we have also borrowed information from the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. This information can also be found on the Internet at www50.pcepd.gov/pcepd/.

We hope you find the Disability Etiquette Handbook helpful. Please let us know of your suggestions and comments.

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Attitudinal Barriers

People with disabilities face many barriers every day—from physical obstacles in buildings to systemic barriers in employment and civic programs. Yet, often, the most difficult barriers to overcome are attitudes other people carry regarding people with disabilities. Whether born from ignorance, fear, misunderstanding or hate, these attitudes keep people from appreciating—and experiencing—the full potential a person with a disability can achieve.

The most pervasive negative attitude is focusing on a person's disability rather than on an individual's abilities. A lawyer is effective if he or she has a solid grasp of law and can present a complete case before a jury or judge; that the lawyer accesses law books through a Kurzweil reader because he or she is blind is immaterial to the job skill. A rancher is effective if she or he feeds the cattle and mends the fences; that the rancher with paraplegia operates a cattle feeder system in the bed of a truck via a rod from the cab or rides an all-terrain vehicle to reach fences is immaterial to the job skill. A stocker in a factory is effective if he or she packages the proper number of items in each bin; that the stocker, because of a developmental disability that limits attention span, uses a counting device is not only immaterial to the job skill, but can make—and has made—that person the most accurate stocker on the factory floor.

People with disabilities encounter many different forms of attitudinal barriers.

Inferiority: Because a person may be impaired in one of life's major functions, some people believe that individual is a "second-class citizen." However, most people with disabilities have skills that make the impairment moot in the workplace.

Pity: People feel sorry for the person with a disability, which tends to lead to patronizing attitudes. People with disabilities generally don't want pity and charity, just equal opportunity to earn their own way and live independently.

Hero worship: People consider someone with a disability who lives independently or pursues a profession to be brave or "special" for overcoming a disability. But most people with disabilities do not want accolades for performing day-to-day tasks. The disability is there; the individual has simply learned to adapt by using his or her skills and knowledge, just as everybody adapts to being tall, short, strong, fast, easy-going, bald, blonde, etc.

Ignorance: People with disabilities are often dismissed as incapable of accomplishing a task without the opportunity to display their skills. In fact, people with quadriplegia can drive cars and have children. People who are blind can tell time on a watch and visit museums. People who are deaf can play baseball and enjoy music. People with developmental disabilities can be creative and maintain strong work ethics.

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Attitudinal Barriers (Con't)

The Spread Effect: People assume that an individual's disability negatively affects other senses, abilities or personality traits, or that the total person is impaired. For example, many people shout at people who are blind or don't expect people using wheelchairs to have the intelligence to speak for themselves. Focusing on the person's abilities rather than his or her disability counters this type of prejudice.

Stereotypes: The other side of the spread effect is the positive and negative generalizations people form about disabilities. For example, many believe that all people who are blind are great musicians or have a keener sense of smell and hearing, that all people who use wheelchairs are docile or compete in paralympics, that all people with developmental disabilities are innocent and sweet-natured, that all people with disabilities are sad and bitter. Aside from diminishing the individual and his or her abilities, such prejudice can set too high or too low a standard for individuals who are merely human.

Backlash: Many people believe individuals with disabilities are given unfair advantages, such as easier work requirements. Employers need to hold people with disabilities to the same job standards as co-workers, though the means of accomplishing the tasks may differ from person to person. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require special privileges for people with disabilities, just equal opportunities.

Denial: Many disabilities are "hidden," such as learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, epilepsy, cancer, arthritis and heart conditions. People tend to believe these are not bona fide disabilities needing accommodation. The ADA defines "disability" as an impairment that "substantially limits one or more of the major life activities." Accommodating "hidden" disabilities which meet the above definition can keep valued employees on the job and open doors for new employees.

Fear: Many people are afraid that they will "do or say the wrong thing" around someone with a disability. They therefore avert their own discomfort by avoiding the individual with a disability. As with meeting a person from a different culture, frequent encounters can raise the comfort level.

Breaking Down Barriers: Unlike physical and systematic barriers, attitudinal barriers that often lead to illegal discrimination cannot be overcome simply through laws. The best remedy is familiarity, getting people with and without disabilities to mingle as coworkers, associates and social acquaintances. In time, most of the attitudes will give way to comfort, respect and friendship.



DISABILITY AWARENESS

Think and speak **PERSON FIRST**

First and foremost, an individual with a disability is a person, and not a condition or disease. Only secondarily does the individual have one or more disabling conditions. Hence, it is preferable to refer to the individual as a **person**, and, if important to the situation, a person with a disability. When it is necessary to refer to an individual's disability (and it is not usually necessary), the disability should not be emotionalized or sensationalized. For example, a person is not an epileptic, but rather, a person who has epilepsy.

WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

A disability is a condition which could have been caused by an accident, trauma, heredity, or disease, and which may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech, or mental function. Some people have more than one disability.

WHAT IS A HANDICAP?

A handicap is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person, regardless of whether that person has a disability. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines handicap as something that hampers a person; a disadvantage; a hindrance.

Example: Some people with disabilities use wheelchairs. Stairs, narrow doorways, and curbs are handicaps to people with disabilities who use wheelchairs.

So...people have disabilities, not handicaps, which is a word found offensive by many people with disabilities.

Disabilities can affect many and varied aspects of our lives:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility | <input type="checkbox"/> Speech and Language |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vision | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Ability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental and Emotional Development |



Acceptable And Unacceptable Terms

<u>Acceptable</u>	<u>Unacceptable</u>
Disability: a general term used for a functional limitation that interferes with an individual's ability to walk, hear, speak, see, or take care of other activities of daily living. It may refer to a physical, mental, or sensory condition.	Handicapped, handicapped person (see previous discussion on "What is a Handicap.")
Individual or person with a disability	Cripple – the image conveyed is of a twisted, deformed, or useless body.
Person with...cerebral palsy...multiple sclerosis...muscular dystrophy...spinal cord injury...arthritis. Person who is blind...deaf...etc.	Cerebral palsied, mentally retarded, victim, defective, deformed. These words are sensational, offensive, dehumanizing, degrading, and stigmatizing. Never identify people by their disability.
Deaf and hearing impaired are defined in terms of profound, severe, moderate, mild or slight. Hearing aids may be used by people with any of these levels of hearing loss.	"Deaf and dumb" is as bad as it sounds. The inability to hear or speak does not indicate intelligence.
Person who has mental retardation or developmental disability.	Retarded, moron, imbecile, idiot, crazy. These are extremely offensive labels.
Person who uses a wheelchair or crutches...walks with crutches.	Wheelchair-bound; confined to a wheelchair. Most people who use wheelchairs or mobility devices do not regard them as confining, but as a liberating means of getting around.
Able to walk...see...hear, etc. Person who does not have a disability.	"Healthy," when used to contrast with "disabled." Healthy implies that the person with a disability is unhealthy. Many people with disabilities are in excellent health. Also unacceptable: "Normal," when used as the opposite of "disabled." Normal implies that the disabled person is abnormal.
One who has (name of disability), e.g., one who has Multiple Sclerosis.	Afflicted with, or suffers from. Most people with disabilities do not regard themselves as afflicted or suffering continually.



Conversation Etiquette

When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is acceptable. For those who cannot shake hands, touch the person lightly on the shoulder or arm to welcome and acknowledge their presence.

Treat adults in a manner befitting adults. Call a person by his or her first name only when extending that familiarity to all others present.

When talking to a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person, rather than through a companion who may be along.

Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along" that seem to relate to the person's disability.

Individuals Who Have Severe Hearing Impairments:

To get the attention of a person with a hearing impairment, tap the person lightly on the shoulder, or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, naturally and slowly to establish whether the person can read lips. Not all persons with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who can will rely on facial expression and other body language to help in understanding. Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking. Shouting won't help. Written notes may. If an interpreter is present, speak to the person who is hearing impaired, not to the interpreter. Always maintain eye contact with the individual with the hearing impairment, not the interpreter. Do not shout at a hearing impaired person. Shouting distorts sounds accepted through hearing aids and inhibits lip reading.

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Conversation Etiquette (Con't)

Individuals Who Use Wheelchairs:

When talking for more than a few minutes with a person who uses a wheelchair, sit down if possible, in order to place yourself at the person's eye level to facilitate conversation. Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder. When addressing a person who uses a wheelchair, never lean on the person's wheelchair. The chair is part of the space that belongs to the person who uses it.

Individuals Who Have Severe Loss of Vision:

When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, give a vocal cue by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking. Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate in advance when you will be moving from one place to another and let it be known when the conversation is at an end. When walking with an individual with a severe loss of vision, allow the person to take your arm (at or about the elbow.) This will enable you to guide rather than propel the person. Do not shout at a person who is blind or visually impaired -- he or she can hear you!

Individuals Who Have Severe Speech Impediments:

Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has a speech impediment. Exercise patience. Don't attempt to finish sentences for the individual. When necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. If you have difficulty communicating, be willing to repeat or rephrase a question.

For All Persons with Disabilities

Offer assistance in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect. Be prepared to have your offer declined. Do not proceed to assist if your offer to assist is declined. If the offer is accepted, listen to or accept instructions.



Myths About People With Disabilities

Myth: All people with disabilities are brave and courageous.

Fact: Having a disability does not make one brave, or timid. Just like everyone, some people with disabilities are brave, some are not.

Myth: Wheelchair use is confining; those who use wheelchairs are “wheelchair bound.”

Fact: Wheelchairs actually liberate the people who use them, allowing them to participate in community affairs. Without their wheelchairs, these individuals would truly be “bound.”

Myth: People who are blind can read in braille.

Fact: Fewer than 50% of the individuals who are blind can read braille.

Myth: People who are blind have highly developed other senses.

Fact: While many people who are blind make greater use of their other senses to compensate for their loss of vision, these other senses do not develop any differently than those of people with vision.

Myth: People who are hearing impaired can read lips.

Fact: Very few people who are hearing impaired can read lips, and for those who can, only about 30% of “lip reading” can be understood.

Myth: People with disabilities are more comfortable “with their own kind.”

Fact: This is simply false. While people with disabilities may share a common dislike for those whose attitudes and actions impede them from fully participating in the community, they are most comfortable with family, friends, associates, and all those who value them and treat them as equals.

Myth: Curious children should never be allowed to ask people about their disabilities.

Fact: Children are naturally curious. Reasonable interest is to be expected, and most people with disabilities do not mind respectful questions. It is an opportunity to help our future generation understand and develop positive attitudes.

Myth: People with disabilities cannot/should not work.

Fact: While the general unemployment rate is around 4%, the unemployment rate for people who have disabilities is about 70%. Most adults with disabilities want to have meaningful jobs and contribute to society. It is the attitudes of others which usually stand in their way.

Myth: People with disabilities are different.

Fact: People with disabilities have much in common with those who do not have disabilities. Almost every person, whether or not they are perceived to have a disability, wants to have love in his/her life, a family, meaningful work, and recreational opportunities. Only physical and attitudinal barriers cause differences in achieving these goals.



AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990.

The purpose of the Act is to:

- ❑ Provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate to end discrimination against individuals with disabilities
- ❑ Provide enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities
- ❑ Ensure that the Federal government plays a central role in enforcing these standards on behalf of individuals with disabilities

Protection under the ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act applies to all individuals with physical and/or mental impairments that substantially limit one of more major life activities, individuals with a record of such impairment, or individuals regarded as having such impairments. This is the same definition used in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Section 503 of the Fair Housing Amendments Act.

The ADA provides people with disabilities civil rights protection like that provided to individuals on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in:

- ✓ Employment
- ✓ Public Accommodations and Services
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ State and Local Government Services
- ✓ Telecommunications



Some Employment Tips

- DO** learn where to find and recruit people with disabilities
 - DO** learn how to communicate with people who have disabilities
 - DO** ensure that your applications and other company forms do not ask disability-related questions, and that they are in formats acceptable to all persons with disabilities
 - DO** consider having written job descriptions that identify the essential functions of each job
 - DO** ensure that requirements for medical examinations comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
 - DO** relax, and make the applicant feel comfortable
 - DO** provide reasonable accommodations that the qualified applicant will need to compete for the job
 - DO** treat an individual with a disability the same way you would treat any applicant or employee
 - DO** know that among those protected by the ADA are qualified individuals who have AIDS, cancer, who have mental retardation, who are deaf or hearing impaired, who are blind, who have a traumatic brain-injury, and who have a learning disability
 - DO** understand that access includes not only environmental access, but also such things as making forms accessible to people with visual or cognitive disabilities, and making alarms and signals accessible to people with hearing disabilities
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- DON'T** assume that persons with disabilities do not want to work
 - DON'T** ask if a person has a disability during an employment interview
 - DON'T** assume that certain jobs are more suited to persons with disabilities
 - DON'T** assume that your current management will need special training to learn how to work with people with disabilities
 - DON'T** assume that the cost of accident insurance will increase as a result of hiring a person with a disability
 - DON'T** assume that the work environment will be unsafe if an employee has a disability
 - DON'T** assume that reasonable accommodations are expensive
 - DON'T** assume you haven't any jobs that a person with a disability can do
 - DON'T** make medical judgments



A Final Word: Service Animals

Over 12,000 people with disabilities use the aid of service animals. Although the most familiar types of service animals are guide dogs used by people who are blind, service animals assist persons who have other disabilities as well. Many disabling conditions are invisible. Therefore, every person who is accompanied by a service animal may or may not "look" disabled. A service animal is NOT required to have any special certification.

What is a Service Animal?

A service animal is NOT a pet!

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):

A service animal is any animal that has been individually trained to provide assistance or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a physical or mental disability which substantially limits one or more major life functions.

Service Dog Etiquette:

- ✓ Do not touch the Service Animal, or the person it assists, without permission.
- ✓ Do not make noises at the Service Animal, it may distract the animal from doing its job.
- ✓ Do not feed the Service Animal, it may disrupt his/her schedule.
- ✓ Do not be offended if the person does not feel like discussing his/her disability or the assistance the Service Animal provides. Not everyone wants to be a walking-talking "show and tell" exhibit.





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Baltimore County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs or activities.

The report is available in alternative format upon request.